

Downs (F.B.)

JAMES R. CUMMING, M.D.,
OF BRIDGEPORT.

AN OBITUARY SKETCH,

BY

F. B. DOWNS, M.D.

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James Russell Cumming, M.D., died at his home in Bridgeport, Connecticut, corner of Courtland and John streets, early in the morning of February 4, 1891. At his bedside were his wife, family and friends. Dr. Cumming's death was not unexpected; in fact, nothing but an unusually strong constitution had enabled him to resist the progress of the disease, diabetes, with which he was afflicted, but from which he would probably have recovered, had not consumption set in while he was in a weakened condition. In the latter part of November, 1890, he was compelled to give up practice, with the exception of a few old patients who called at his office. He lost strength steadily from that time, and when he died he was reduced to a mere shadow of his former self. During his last illness he was attended by Doctors Hubbard and Porter.

Dr. Cumming was born in the town of North Adams, Berkshire county, Massachusetts, April 16, 1830; a county noted for its rugged hills and for the many hardy sons it has produced, who like himself have been the architects of their own fortunes. His father, a merchant in comparatively easy circumstances, instilled into the minds of his sons the maxim that the only road to prosperity is through hard work, and plenty of it. His mother was for many years an invalid, and the family moved from place to place for the benefit of her health.

His early education was received in Detroit, Michigan. After a few years the family returned east. In 1846 he attended the Canajoharie Academy and ended his school days by graduating from the old Academy in Westfield, Massachusetts, an institution famous years ago.

At the age of twenty he became a teacher in Sandy Brook,



Connecticut, and before he had attained his majority he was appointed principal of the Farmington Academy, which position he held for several years. It was here he married Miss Jane Cowles, daughter of the Hon. Samuel Cowles. She died two years after the marriage, leaving an infant daughter.

He began the study of medicine with Dr. Holcomb of West Granby, Connecticut, and was graduated at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, New York, in 1862. He roomed during his college course with Dr. Frank P. Foster, who says of him, "He was about fifteen years older than I was, and consequently he was a mentor to whom I looked up. Besides that, I liked him personally. He was liked generally by the students. He was studious and had the true spirit of a seeker after useful knowledge."

After graduating he entered the army as assistant surgeon, enlisting April 30, 1862, in the 12th C. V. On the 26th of November, 1864, he was transferred to the 12th Connecticut Battalion, and promoted to surgeon March 13, 1865. He was mustered out August 12, 1865. The principal engagements he took part in were at New Orleans, siege of Port Hudson, Brashear City, Winchester, Fisher's Hill and Cedar Creek. Many are the times my eyes have been suffused with tears at the thrilling experiences he has narrated and his interesting reminiscences of that eventful period. He loved the Grand Army and was proud to be enrolled among its members.

At the close of the war he returned to the College of Physicians and Surgeons, New York, to brush up for general practice, and there formed the acquaintance of Dr. W. A. M. Wainwright, who says of him, "He was a man, I think, who naturally attracted his fellow men, so it was not long before our acquaintance grew into friendship on both our parts, and on mine ripened into respect for his manly character and into admiration for his bright and sunny nature and his honest and kindly disposition."

He came to Bridgeport in 1867, and soon acquired a good general practice, becoming identified with state, county and city societies. In 1871 he married Miss Anna S. Hubbell, daughter of Fenelon and Harriet Hubbell, by whom two sons were born, Pierson R. and Timothy. The first time I ever

saw Dr. Cumming he was fifty years of age and I just entering practice. He lived then at the corner of Main and Bank streets in the very center and active business portion of the city. The Doctor was an unusually handsome gentleman, of erect and finely developed form. His features were well defined and his general appearance indicated the possession of robust health, and with his hair and beard almost white and dress spotless, he looked the very picture of a good natured, intelligent and prosperous physician. We soon became on the best of terms and remained fast friends until the last. A day or two before he died he fell asleep holding my hand, and as I looked back over the many profitable and pleasant hours spent in his society, a grateful feeling took possession of me for the privilege I had had of learning so much from my association with him. His naturally strong understanding was improved by extensive reading. His private habits endeared him to his friends.

Dr. Cumming was particularly self-sacrificing in his devotion to his family. During the fatal sickness of his daughter, notwithstanding the exhausting labors of the usual duties of an active practice, night after night he spent by her bed-side and ministered to her wants. A few months before his death, in a severe sickness of his wife, his unremitting attentions to her during an attack of congestion of the lungs, both by day and night, reduced in a marked degree his vitality, already feeble, and without doubt hastened the progress of his trouble. In a like manner the constant and unremitting care of his wife in the last few weeks of his sickness largely contributed to hasten her death, which followed that of the Doctor in last May.

The Bridgeport City Medical Society endorses this tribute of one of its members: "I cannot allow this opportunity to pass without paying some tribute to the memory of one whose accustomed place here is vacant to-night; whose faithful labors in our profession and at these meetings are at an end, but whose kindly sympathy, whose discriminating service in the interest of suffering humanity still lives and will be forever enshrined in the memory of those who were co-laborers with him, as well as with those who were privileged to receive pro-

fessional ministrations at his hands. With quiet simplicity, with unremitting fidelity, his work has been accomplished. The testing period of waiting patiently the Divine summons has passed; 'he rests from his labors and his works do follow him.' Our thoughts go out in sympathy to those who by this bereavement lose a kind husband, a loving and thoughtful father, but the memory and heritage of his good name and faithful life may be an inspiration through all the years to come and remain with them as one of their choicest possessions."



